

Forget Botox — ‘thread lifts’ are the latest face-lift trend



When it first came out in the late '90s, the so-called “thread lift” (using surgical thread to lift sagging skin) was heralded as the kinder, gentler face-lift. But scary side effects, such as scarring, infection and obvious lumps under the skin, made it a bad fit for most women. Now, thanks to technological advances, the rejuvenation technique has needed its way back to doctors’ offices.

The new-and-improved thread lift is FDA-cleared and noninvasive, with little-to-no downtime. That’s why it’s becoming an increasingly popular way to tighten and re-suspend moderately saggy cheeks, jowls, brows and neck.

The new sutures are composed of polydioxanone (PDO), which has been used safely in cardiovascular surgery for years; don’t require anchoring; and are fully absorbed by the skin in six months without creating scar tissue, says New York City dermatologist Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank. “Sutures, incisions and the risks are dramatically smaller than before,” he says.

The old threads, meanwhile, were made of permanent barbed sutures. “If the knots made to anchor the threads were not performed correctly,” says New York City dermatologist Dr. Shereene Idriss, “it could lead to visible bumps and nodules.”

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Performed under local anesthesia, today's thread lifts take an hour or two. Sutures embedded with tiny cones are inserted into the skin using a small cannula, similar to those used for injecting fillers. The cones grab skin from underneath and lift it, while simultaneously causing collagen-stimulating inflammation (which helps add volume).

Effects are immediately visible, improve over the next several months and can last up to two years. The average cost is \$3,000 to \$4,500, compared to \$10,000 or more for a traditional face-lift.

Side effects include temporary soreness, swelling and bruising, similar to those of injectables. And because there is some possibility of nerve damage, it's safest to use a board-certified cosmetic dermatologist.

"The ideal candidate has good skin quality, moderate sagging in the mid-face and strong underlying bone structure," says Dr. Idriss. "Patients with very thin skin, little underlying fat or excessive sagging are not well suited for it."

Amanda, a 45-year-old patient of Dr. Frank's (who requested her last name not be used for privacy reasons), is pleased with her results. "It lifted the most frustrating part of my face that fillers and skin-tightening lasers couldn't do — the fold on the side of my chin and my smile line," says the New York-based attorney. "I saw the results immediately, and after a few days of feeling like something was under my skin, I didn't notice anything but improvement."

While the new thread lift is increasingly common — Dr. Idriss does several a day — the technique won't replace other anti-agers anytime soon.

"Fillers are for volume, Botox restricts wrinkle-causing muscle movement and cosmetic surgery cuts out excess tissue to treat significant laxity," Dr. Frank says. "Thread lifts can't replace a face-lift, but, in combination with other treatments, they can help delay the inevitable."